

Inmates earn diplomas through prison education program

Smyrna – Wearing black caps and gowns over their white prison jumpsuits, 10 men earned their high school diplomas today.

The graduates from the James H. Groves Adult High School at the James T. Vaughn Correctional Center in Smyrna are among 30 inmates across the state who are celebrating graduations through the Department of Education's prison education program this spring. There are 123 inmates currently enrolled in Groves classes.

With Governor Jack Markell giving special remarks, the Vaughn inmates were the first to flip their tassels. Additional Groves graduation ceremonies in Delaware prison facilities will take place at Sussex Correctional Institution in Georgetown tomorrow, Baylor Women's Correctional Institution in New Castle on July 13 and Howard R. Young Correctional Institution in Wilmington on July 22.

Today's ceremony was an emotional one for the men, their family and friends who came to celebrate with them, and the teachers and correctional staff who have supported them.

"The fact that you have been able to accomplish this says so much about what you are capable of doing," Markell told the men. "You had the determination, the can-do-attitude and the intelligence to persevere, and that says a lot."

Commissioner of Correction Robert Coupe recognized the combined efforts of the individuals and agencies that make the prison education program possible: "Today's graduation is the result of years of hard work by each one of these students who are demonstrating their intention to forge a new path for their future. It also reflects the strong partnership between the Department of Education and Department of Correction to

provide classroom and vocational instruction to offenders as part of Governor Markell's commitment to provide them with skills and tools they need to secure employment, which will reduce recidivism and improve public safety."

The Department of Correction and Department of Education partner to provide classroom educational instruction to inmates in our prison facilities. The DOE commits about four dozen staff members who are assigned to prison facilities to provide and direct a wide variety of instruction through the Groves School, GED classes, computer classes and vocational classes such as culinary arts, auto tech, masonry and HVAC. DOE also provides life skills classes, which help inmates with skills needed to be successful upon re-entry to society.

Graduate Kevin Robinson spoke on behalf of the class, congratulating his peers and thanking the prison education teachers and correctional staff who helped the men achieve.

"I know it's not always easy teaching folks who never thought they were capable of learning," he said, also thanking the family and friends in attendance. "Knowing you have someone in your corner encouraging you ... is enough to keep you going."

Maureen Whalen, director of Adult & Prison Education Resources for the Delaware Department of Education, encouraged the graduates to continue achieving in and out of prison.

"This state believes in second chances and believes in the value each of you can bring back to the community," she said.

For graduates such as Robinson, what was important this morning was not what led them to prison but where the diplomas will lead them when they get out.

"I see proof that ... we still can achieve greatness," he said.

[Find photos from the ceremony here.](#)

Media interested in covering one of the upcoming graduation

ceremonies should contact Jason.Miller@delaware.gov.



Groves High School
graduates (James T. Vaughn
Correctional Center)

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